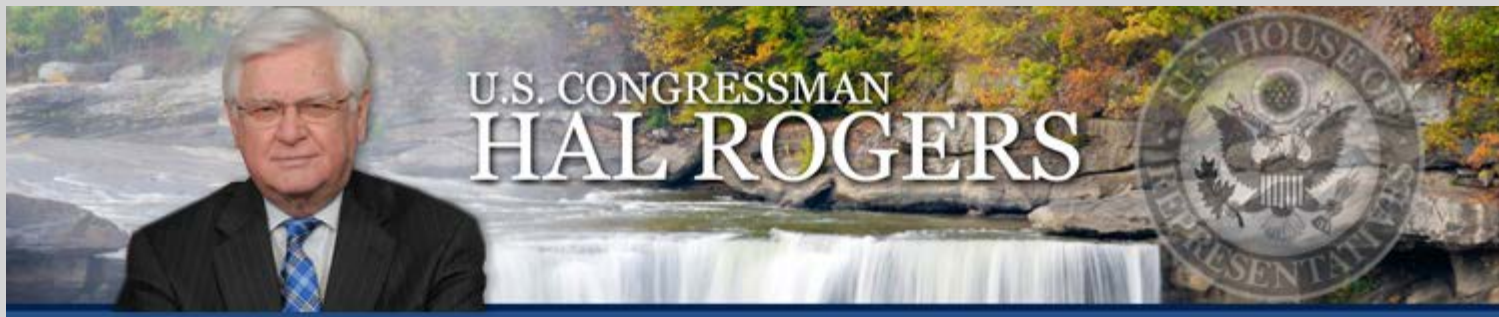


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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Bipartisan RECLAIM Act will release \$1 Billion in AML Funds to Support Coal Communities

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** - A new bipartisan bill aims to accelerate \$1 billion in available funding in the Abandoned Mine Reclamation (AML) Fund to revitalize coal communities hardest hit by the downturn of the coal industry. The RECLAIM Act: Revitalizing the Economy of Coal Communities by Leveraging Local Activities and Investing More, was filed today by Congressmen Hal Rogers (R-Ky.), Matt Cartwright (D-Pa.), Evan Jenkins (R-WV.), Don Beyer (D-Va.), and Morgan Griffith (R-Va.).

Coal communities throughout the United States have been struggling to cope with significant job losses after a decrease in nation-wide coal production in recent years, and the RECLAIM Act aims to support economic and community development projects in these areas. Specifically, the legislation releases \$1 billion from the existing balance in the AML Fund to assist communities that have traditionally relied on the coal industry for employment or have recently experienced significant coal job losses. Under the plan, \$200 million will be distributed to participating states annually for five years, and the legislation empowers States and Indian tribes to work with local communities to identify and fund economic development projects on AML sites.

"In Kentucky alone, we've lost more than 11,000 coal mining jobs since 2009. Instead of allowing those funds to go unused, now is the time to help our coal producing states reinvest in the coalfields with projects that can create new jobs and reinvigorate our economy," **said Rep. Rogers**. "Many coal communities in Appalachia simply do not have the resources to reclaim the abandoned mine sites within their borders. This bill allows these communities to be proactive in restoring these sites and utilize them to put our people back to work."

Passage of this legislation will compliment other congressional efforts that have aimed to support economic development in coal communities, such as increased and targeted funding for the Economic Development Administration and the Appalachian Regional Commission. The RECLAIM Act mirrors a section of the White House's POWER+ proposal that requires a statutory change to the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA).

"Appalachian states continue to face the combined calamity of a collapsing coal industry and the environmental legacy of over a century of mining. For the families that depended on mining jobs, benefits, and pensions that have disappeared as coal companies have closed their operations, we must act to provide new opportunities," **said Rep. Cartwright**. "Additionally, we must address the environmental legacy left by abandoned mines. Across northeastern Pennsylvania, there are thousands of miles of streams impacted by mine drainage, many of which are totally devoid of aquatic life. It's time to actually spend the money we have been collecting for decades in the trust fund. We must clean up our region and help rejuvenate small communities across Appalachia."

The majority of the funding will be directly distributed by the Secretary of the Interior to states with unmet reclamation needs. Meanwhile, \$5 million each year will be provided through grants for coal-producing states that no longer have abandoned mine lands.

"Regrettably, recent years in the coalfields of Southwest Virginia and throughout Appalachia have been difficult," **said**

**Rep. Griffith.** “After all, life above ground is impacted when work stops underground as the result of a regulatory onslaught on coal regions, the low cost of competitive fuel, and a sluggish world economy. The RECLAIM Act is an imperative effort to help reinvigorate our hard-hit communities through economic and community development. I will continue fighting along with Congressman Rogers and others to advance economic development strategies such as this which would help keep and grow jobs in Appalachia.”

After two years, each state will have the opportunity to apply for bonus payments for any remaining AML funds that have not been utilized.

“As Lieutenant Governor and gubernatorial candidate, I spent nine years touring Virginia’s coal counties. I witnessed the harsh effects of an economic downturn as well as the degradation of the land,” **said Rep. Beyer.** “By reinvesting this money in these communities, we will provide access to much needed jobs and help to restore unused and abandoned mines.”

The RECLAIM Act also comes on the heels of a similar AML Pilot Project included in the 2016 Omnibus bill. The \$90 million pilot – which will be implemented in Kentucky, Pennsylvania and West Virginia – will provide coal communities with grants to reclaim abandoned mine lands with economic development purposes in mind, create new job opportunities and stimulate the local economy.

“Thousands of West Virginia coal miners have lost their jobs in the past five years, and our communities have been decimated by the struggling coal market. Nowhere is this problem more critical than Appalachia, especially in my district in Southern West Virginia,” **said Rep. Jenkins.** “Our small towns and families need the resources to rebuild, attract new employers, create jobs, and give hope to the people who call Appalachia home. I commend Chairman Rogers and my fellow cosponsors for their passion for this issue and their belief that we must get our economy moving again.”

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